

December 7, 2006

**REFUGEE WORKING GROUP
Salt Lake County Council Chambers
2001 S State, North Building, Room 1100
Salt Lake City, UT**

The meeting was called to order at 7:09 p.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mayor Peter Corroon, Salt Lake County Mayor, welcomed the attendees to the meeting. Mayor Corroon welcomed Mr. Edwin Silverman and thanked the state government for helping to organize the Refugee Working Group and the monthly meetings. Mayor Corroon introduced Mr. Palmer DePaulis.

Mr. DePaulis introduced Dr. Edwin Silverman, Bureau Chief, Refugee and Immigrant Services, Illinois Department of Human Services. Mr. DePaulis highlighted Dr. Silverman's professional background. Some of the successes Dr. Silverman's programs have achieved over the years, both in Illinois and federally were enumerated. He explained that this meeting would be devoted to Dr. Silverman's presentation, with some time set aside for a question and answer period.

Presentation by Dr. Edwin Silverman, Bureau Chief, Refugee and Immigrant Services, Illinois Department of Human Services

Dr. Silverman outlined the importance of the Refugee Working Group initiative both for Utah and for the nation. He stated he was pleased to be in Utah and a part of "Democracy in Action." Throughout his career in Illinois, he has assisted 130,000 refugees. The first thing Dr. Silverman asks when invited to help with refugee issues is "what needs to be done and what am I prohibited from doing." After these questions are answered he works with all the parties involved to move toward some creative solutions to the problems being encountered.

Dr. Silverman emphasized that understanding the refugee situation revolves around how you look at the world. 82% of the world is comprised of people of color. The most critical issue before the world today is global migration. There are approximately 190,000 migrants in the world, half of them women. In the Middle East, 90% of the workforce is foreign born. Governments across the globe are looking at ways to integrate immigrants into their countries. Integration is a dynamic multi-directional process in which new comers intentionally work together based on tolerance, freedom, and justice to ensure a vibrant cohesive society. There are many disenfranchised populations throughout the world. Volunteerism and community provide empowerment for refugee communities in the U.S. It is easier to get jobs, start businesses, and acquire an education in the United States than in any other place on the globe. The United States is facing a phenomenon of immigration in 2006. The 1990's were unprecedented in the influx of foreign-born immigrants. In the 1990's the majority of the immigrants to this country settled in the large cities. At the present time many of the immigrants are settling in smaller urban areas in North Carolina, Nebraska, and Utah. The Refugee Program is the

only federal immigrant policy we have. We know, from working through the Refugee Program, that providing welcome expedites immigrant self-sufficiency.

Dr. Silverman relayed a story of a Rwandan refugee who came to America six years ago. This refugee is now an honor student in one of the best schools in Illinois. She is one of 50,000 teens who submitted an entry to Oprah's Teen Essay Contest and won. Another story relayed was about an Ethiopian musician who fled Ethiopia, wandered through Africa, wound up in Chicago, driving a taxi. This refugee was told about a music club that was going to be auctioned. He put together a group of people who organized the first Reggae club in America. At the present time, this refugee is wealthy has just completed building his tenth school in Ethiopia.

All integration is local and is a product of the human and physical resources that can be brought to bear. Chicago and Salt Lake City are very different. Chicago has been multi-cultural since its inception. Dr. Silverman highlighted immigrants in the Chicago area who have contributed much to Illinois and the Country. The Caucasian population in Chicago is 36%. Immigrants and their children account for 20% of the population. The diverse economy in Chicago is a natural attraction for immigrants. Utah's history and context is different. 12.5% of families in Utah speak a different language than English without adequate resources to learn English. 55% of the attendees in Illinois' colleges are registered in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Dr. Silverman explained that he is from an immigrant family. He saw firsthand how joint problem solving was the way to resolve difficulties. Services to refugees and other immigrants need to be culturally competent and tied to language. "Language is gold." The better your English the higher your wage is generally. Job placement, English language training, refugee specific health and mental health programs, and community based programs for survivors of torture all help various ethnic groups to become an integral part of the city and state.

In Illinois, Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) have received various refugee service money to develop capacity. The workers in the MAAs are from the community and understand the clients and had pride in that association. The agencies were established by hiring people dedicated to capacity building. Entering into American culture, it is difficult to understand how to do business and how to conduct a solid non-profit organization.

Dr. Silverman presented a graph representing refugee entrants into Illinois and into Utah over time (see attached graphs). Refugee arrivals in Illinois decreased from over 12,000 in 2000 to less than 4,000 in 2005. Over the same time period, Utah also saw a decrease. Refugee arrivals have dropped dramatically over the past five years nation-wide. The second graph, Social Service Allocations indicate funding is per capita driven. Large states receive more refugees and therefore more money. When arrivals drop, so does the money. Targeted Assistance Grants (TAG) and social service money as well as State money has enabled Illinois to sustain new MAAs as well as some older MAAs. One

MAA, Pan African Association is comprised of 45% professionals from 48 nations. The organizers understood the need for a Pan African Coalition to support their community.

Refugee programs suffer from serious gaps – what are the solutions? A shortage of adult English language trainers is significant. There are insufficient dollars in adult ESL programs throughout the country. This is a crisis because we need an educated work force. Thirty-six percent of the U.S. labor force is foreign born. Twenty-nine percent of those holding masters' degrees in the labor force are foreign born. The U.S. currently faces a shortage of 500,000 nurses. Our future depends on a skilled workforce and being able to integrate newcomers into our society in a profitable and harmonious way.

In Chicago, early MAA development was accomplished with the help of Voluntary Agencies (VolAgs) to groom and introduce them to the needs of operating an organization. Some of the Chicago MAAs received a direct grant and entered the struggle. Growth of MMAs requires continual assessment of community needs. There must be a planned process of leadership development and leadership change. Term limits need to be scattered. Planning for the future is critical to that survival.

This working group needs to find the mission it can absolutely accomplish. It is fine to dream but it is also important to determine how much money is available and how much manpower is available to accomplish your goal. Assessment of local factors is also important; whom is your organization competing against for available funds. Is another organization able to provide the service better than you can?

Refugees are more diverse than ever before. State legislators, agencies, counties and the governor all need to be supportive of refugee issues but the money resides with the legislature. You need to have legislators on line with refugee issues and by the same token they have to be convinced any money spent on refugee programs is a worthwhile expenditure.

Dr. Silverman asked where United Way and the foundations are in helping with the refugee issues. One of the most dynamic ventures in Illinois occurred with the State Refugee Agency was convinced to put money up for capacity building for community based organizations if foundations matched the money put up. The foundations came through and over 5 years contributions of \$2 million from the state was matched with \$4 million from the foundations. This \$6 million influx of money made a dramatic impact on more than 30 agencies throughout Illinois. MAAs require consultants with expertise to guide them to become an integral part of the mainstream. Dr. Silverman suggested research be performed using www.gcir.org as a resource. Grant makers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) is a national network of foundations with concern for the needs of newcomers to the United States.

Initially MAAs in the Chicago area started out with a five-year plan. At the beginning almost all their funding came through the Refugee Office. The second five years they began to diversify and by the end of ten years they were free of refugee money. At the present time, the MAAs compete for State, Local, Federal, Corporate, and Foundation

funds. Leadership of the MAAs must satisfy their Board of Directors, staff, and funding sources within the community.

One critical element to integration is citizenship and civic participation. Naturalization is important. Studying to obtain citizenship is an added resource for learning English. Refugee issues are bipartisan and one way to show this bipartisanism to the State Legislature is by conducting demographic studies of both naturalized and non-naturalized constituents by state legislative district. Tax contributions and the economics of immigration are also topics that the legislature is interested in learning. Dr. Silverman suggested MAAs start outreach and interpreter service projects. One MAA in Illinois began an interpreter service. 1½ years after its inception, the MAA became free standing and receives stipends from hospitals for their services.

The Illinois Department of Human Services formed a limited English proficiency task force. Each of the six divisions in the Department of Human Services appoints a liaison to the task force. The task force developed work plans to improve access for limited English proficient people. Do the Utah agencies know who they are serving and how many need interpreters? Cultural training is essential both for clients and agencies. It is imperative to organize a high level task force. The Utah Refugee Work Group is laying the foundation for something comparable in Utah. At least 15% of the Utah population is Latino. Is Latino population receiving 15% of the available resources?

Dr. Silverman believes we are underestimating the private sector and the potential of their power to help the refugee population. Illinois has a massive budget deficit; over the last four years every program in the State has seen reductions, except for immigrant services. In part the continuation of funding immigrant services is a result of coalitions that have been built that could lobby the legislature. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant Refugee Rights is a powerful advocacy arm. Not only have they opened doors in Illinois for immigrants and refugees, but they have also led the initiative across the country.

Dr. Silverman closed his presentation with a quote from a social worker in Kenya – “Did you ever see a border – they are all fictions designed to divide us – we’re all brothers and sisters.”

Question and Answer Period

How has Illinois been monitoring how the money is being utilized for immigrants?

Dr. Silverman administers the budgets and has independent audits on each agency. His agency only works with certified 501(c)(3) non-profit agencies. Illinois has used fiscal agents to oversee the financial aspects of the MMAs until they develop expertise in that area. Money management is critical to the whole process of developing and maintaining an MMA. Dr. Silverman relayed the example of a Chicago Laotian MAA that decided being tied to federal and state funding was too constrictive for them. They felt they were not a social service agency and did not have the skills necessary to put up with

government reporting. At the present time, this Laotian MMA continues independently on private funding.

With regard to welcoming refugees, what has Dr. Silverman found to be helpful in the welcoming process?

The Illinois Refugee Program would not have continued without the churches and without volunteers. Intensive up front communication and welcoming is critical. Welcoming Centers have been organized in local high schools as places for refugee children to come for shelter, support, and reinforcement. Illinois' governor has embarked on a program to set up Welcoming Centers throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. Critical people in the refugee process are the English Language Teachers. They become the conduit to language and therefore the nexus for the whole society.

Dr. Silverman emphasized the need to provide up-front services for all immigrant populations. In the United States, Latino immigrant populations are swelling. Institutionally we have not provided welcome to them. The Latino population is experiencing high levels of poverty and a lack of insurance, drop out rates are on the rise, and many cities are seeing an increase in teen mothers.

In America there appears to be an attitude of "do as we do," the general attitude is not welcoming.

Dr. Silverman relayed that in America, we are deeply deprived of cultural competency. Americans sit before TV without realizing that only 33% of the world population is Christian and that 82% of the world's population is of color. Coalitions are based on the understanding that we are in the same boat and need to share the available resources.

The Immigrant/Refugee System in Utah is not as broad-based as the system in Chicago. The federal government does not allocate much money to refugees in Utah. Many refugees do not know how to utilize the services that are available. The Bosnian community integrated themselves into the system. The services are there – how to utilize them is the problem. It is not an easy process to determine who gets what money for serving refugees. States try to do the best they can within the confines of available resources. The number of refugees in Utah alone is not sufficient to draw the attention drawn in Illinois. Coalitions are necessary.

Miro Marinovich from IRC stated that the VolAgs do receive TAG money. They work with all refugees for minimum of 2 years and for refugees receiving public assistance for a 5-year period of time. It is important to let the legislature know of the importance of the refugee program. How informed are the legislators?

The relationship between VolAgs and MAAs is critical. How does Dr. Silverman propose they work together to strengthen services between the two?

Dr. Silverman suggested that the MAAs use VolAgs as mentors. There is a natural connection between the two. MAAs are providing mainstream services and should be competing for mainstream funding. The resources used by the VolAgs are for new arrivals. Many VolAgs are working with refugees whose entire lives have been in camps. Seven million refugees have been living in refugee camps for more than 10 years. They deserve every dollar and every volunteer we can send their way. Needs of refugee communities change as they grow and prosper.

What you think is the most difficult problem facing refugees?

Each individual host community has a responsibility for sustaining this most humane of all government programs. Resettlement is an individual experience. All previous education and many factors come into play. Cultural competency, income, race, sex, and religion all play a part in this very individual experience. In general refugees who are 45+ years have a greater difficulty and never really integrate. Immigration and Refugee Resettlement is all about the children. They can really prosper and grow with educational opportunities. It has been noted that very educated people had great difficulty integrating because of loss of face and loss of stature.

Buba Roth thanked the government of Utah for organizing the Refugee Working Group. After ten years of existence, thanks to the new government, the Utah Consortium of Minority Groups (UCMG) has achieved many successes. The Utah State Superintendent of schools arranged for Dr. Roth to visit Washington, D.C. to attend a “No Child Left Behind” conference. UCMG is represented in a master plan for ESL to be shared via the community. Dr. Roth enumerated many of the accomplishments of the UCMG in the past year.

How have you integrated religious organizations into the process?

Dr. Silverman gave credit to the VolAgs in Illinois for this collaboration. Illinois is home to an Interfaith VolAg and an Evangelical VolAg that have been very successful in encouraging church sponsorship and raising funds. The cost for a VolAg to initially resettle a refugee is \$4,000. The money received from the State Department is \$860. The other needed funding comes from donated goods and money.

Top Down vs Bottom Up development. How are individual voices and ideas heard in the refugee process?

MAAs are formed from the bottom up. Sitting down at the same table and negotiating is critical in the organization process. If negotiation is used in the beginning, coalescence will result. Each MAA must demonstrate to the community that it is productive. Avoidance of suspicion, backbiting and criticism help lend credibility to the organization. There is an initial period of establishing credibility; Government can't make that happen. Convening the interested parties, providing training for officers and volunteers, providing aid to the refugee population, and building capacity are important in the process of developing successful MMAs. MAAs provide an opportunity to form community with

pride and respect of their heritage. MAAs of Illinois apply for a joint grant – one agency is the lead and puts the proposal together – all the MAAs benefit from relationship, in particular the smaller population groups.

Dr. Silverman stated that the ESL situation is the most critical factor in a successful refugee program. Illinois invests more money in adult ESL than any other state. Chicago invests in K-12 and City colleges' ESL programs. Is it enough? No. With regard to Adult ESL, 90% of Adult ESL teachers have not been trained to teach Adult ESL. Adult Learning Resource Center trains volunteers and K-12 teachers who want to teach Adult ESL.

Dr. Silverman thanked the Refugee Working Group for the invitation to come and speak tonight. He thanks the attendees for their attention and questions. Utah has made a great step and is looking at a window of opportunity. This is a very precious moment – maximize that!

Closing Comments and Topics for the Next Meeting

Mayor Corroon thanked Dr. Silverman for his extremely informative presentation. Thirty years from now all the people in the State should be breaking bread, playing sports, and should have become one culture and a united group of people working together. Mayor Corroon stressed that the participants in tonight's meeting remember that working together is where the greatest strength is. Partnering is the best way to work.

Mr. DePaulis thanked everyone in attendance for their patience and questions and thanked Dr. Silverman once again for his presentation.

The next Refugee Working Group meeting is planned for Saturday, January 6, 2007, from 6 – 8 p.m. At the January meeting, the main topic of discussion will be how the stream of federal refugee funding comes through the organizations from the State government. As time permits, we will begin to look at the previously identified gaps, prioritize how to look at the gaps in services, and begin to come up with recommendations for Mayor Corroon and Governor Huntsman.

An attendee asked if there would be a chance to hear from service providers on their challenges and to hear from refugees about problems they have encountered.

Tani Pack Downing reminded the attendees that there were four previous public meetings where refugees outlined to the state and the county their issues with the service providers. From those meetings, a list of gaps in the system has been put together. All the information regarding to the gaps identified is on the working group's web page at www.jobs.utah.gov/refugeeworkinggroup. There are only six meetings before recommendations need to be presented to the Governor and the Mayor. The Refugee Working Group needs to prioritize the gaps and come up with solutions.

Palmer DePaulis stated that there are many different coalitions and many different groups involved in the process. The Working Group's goal is to be totally inclusive in the

process so everyone who wants to be is a part of the identification and recommendation process.